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CIA Can Keep Quiet

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The Central Intelligence Agency considers college campuses "vital sources of intelligence," according to information made public Thursday in a decision by U.S. District Judge Howard G. Munson.

In a federal court order, Munson upheld the CIA's contention that the agency doesn't have to confirm or deny whether it has engaged in covert activities on the Syracuse University campus.

Munson ruled that the CIA's arguments in the SU case came under a 1979 executive order that gives the nation's counter-intelligence force an exemption from the Freedom of Information Act in certain cases.

"What's important to note is that Judge Munson went much further than other courts have" on the issue, one which is the subject of legislation before Congress, according to Daan Braverman, an attorney for the plaintiff.

The case initiated in 1979 by SU's student newspaper, the Daily Orange, is of national importance because Munson required the CIA to offer an explanation why it shouldn't reveal any information, Braverman said.

The Daily Orange demanded to know, under the Freedom of Information Law, whether the CIA had agents on campus during the 1960s and '70s.

Braverman said that through information released by the government, it is now known the CIA did monitor one professor's mail and was involved in some surveillance on campus in the 1970s.

However, the CIA has maintained that to reveal whether it had agents at SU — or any college campus — would violate national security.

In his 12-page decision, Munson detailed explanations given in an affidavit by Don Wortman, CIA deputy director for administration and chairman of its Information Review Committee.

Wortman told the judge that college campuses are important to the CIA for three main reasons:

- "Foreign intelligence information" may be collected from "persons who have travelled abroad," which is of use to the agency.
- University personnel may be used as "confidential contacts" to assist in the "recruitment of non-Americans as foreign intelligence sources."
- Schools are sources of contractual and consultative information for foreign policy research and development.